

CHAPTER 9



The Courage to Criticize "Christianity" in Upholding Slavery

In this chapter, Douglass uses the example of two men, Captain Thomas Auld and Mr. Covey, both recently converted to Christianity, to point out the misuse and abuse of Christianity for the good of the slave owner and overseer. Explore Douglass's rhetorical strategies as he examines the slave owners' use of Christianity as justification for slavery.

1. Douglass states of Captain Thomas Auld, "after his conversion, he found religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty."
 - How does Captain Auld demonstrate that he reads the Bible to find support for his own needs and desires-- in this case, upholding slavery? Consider his treatment of the slave girl, Henny.
 - Moreover, what scriptural passage does Auld quote to justify his inhumane behavior?
2. Comment upon the effectiveness of Douglass's ironic description of Capt. Auld: "Here was a recently converted man, holding on upon the mother, and at the same time turning out her helpless child, to starve and die! Master Thomas was one of the many pious slaveholders who hold slaves for the very charitable purpose of taking care of them." Who might be the audience for Douglass's irony? In what way is this statement ironic?
3. Read the description of Mr. Covey, a slave-breaker who oversaw Frederick Douglass. **Identify the irony and comment upon the tone.** For example, consider the phrase "high reputation" in the context of "breaking young slaves," i.e., breaking human beings? Later in the passage, why does Douglass use the word "professor" to describe Mr. Covey? And what about the effectiveness of the phrases "pious soul," "class-leader," and "nigger-breaker"? Why might Mr. Covey's religious observance "add weight to his reputation"?



CHAPTER 10 The Courage to Fight Back

After six months of working under Mr. Covey, Douglass writes that "Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!"

1. How does the above passage portray the psychological state of a slave? What image or images does the passage evoke? Is this passage a persuasive piece of rhetoric against slavery? How? What is its rhetorical appeal (pathos, logos, ethos)?
2. Douglass prefaces his physical combat with Mr. Covey with the declaration: "You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man." Why is fighting Mr. Covey—literally wrestling with him—an act of courage for Douglass? Why is it yet another turning point in his life?
3. Characterize the language Douglass uses to describe how he felt after fighting with Mr. Covey:
4. How does this descriptive passage compare to his description when he'd been "broken" by Mr. Covey?
5. How does Douglass use religious references to bolster his claims, such as in the phrase "from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom"?
6. In the remainder of chapter ten, Douglass gives numerous examples of his courage: intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical. Identify at least one example of each of these types of courage (one example may, in fact, embody more than one type of courage).
Explain how each of these examples further enhances his humanity and consequently might encourage his reading audience to acknowledge his humanity, too. What rhetorical appeal(s) does Douglass draw on to accomplish this?

	Examples	Purpose/Appeal
INTELLECTUAL COURAGE		
EMOTIONAL COURAGE		
SPIRITUAL COURAGE		
PHYSICAL COURAGE		

